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Some Aspects to be Considered in the

Establishment of a

National Register of Area and Language Specialists

The following is not intended to be definitive, but only to provide a basis for discussion and to illustrate some of the possibilities and limitations of a Register.

Within the complex field of area and language specialists, some of the factors or dimensions to be considered are as follows: degree of language competence, such as simultaneous translation ability vs. partial retention of a rare language; kind of language competence, such as spoken vs. written competencies, or conversational fluency without foreign accent vs. knowledge of specialized or technical vocabulary; kind of area knowledge, such as first-hand familiarity with local details vs. scholarly knowledge of broad aspects having economic, political, or military significance; relative strategic importance of the various languages and areas; rarity of knowledge in terms of number of specialists possessing it; multiplicity of language and/or area knowledges; and professional or technical specialization accompanying knowledge of an area or language.

Such factors or dimensions as the above have a crucial bearing on the design of any proposed Register of area and language specialists.

A Register design may be simple or complex, have broad or restricted coverage of persons, be designed to serve many or few functions. Its intended uses should govern its design.

Functions of a Register

One major function of a Register is to make possible the rapid locating of names and addresses of individuals possessing required patterns of skills and knowledges. This locator function can be useful in event of national mobilization, or sudden localized emergency, or day-to-day operations. It may be used to locate persons for consulting work, for part-time work, or for limited-duration or permanent appointments. In serving this function a Register can only produce lists of individuals having the characteristics covered in the questionnaires. It should also be borne in mind that the information is typically provided by the individuals themselves. Registers probably are most efficient when they restrict the information obtained to that bearing on or related to the competency of registrants in the fields of knowledge about which the Register is organized (e.g., language and area knowledges), leaving such matters as security clearance, physical condition and handicaps, personality characteristics, ability to pass

written or oral tests, and Civil Service eligibility to be handled separately.

A second major function of a Register is to provide statistical or numerical data concerning the population it covers. This is readily done by utilizing the punched cards or computer-coded information designed to facilitate rapid searches for individuals. Statistical analyses can produce such information as the following: the numbers of registered individuals claiming knowledge of specific languages or areas, by level of proficiency or competence, by geographical location of present residence, by age and sex, by type of employer, by salary, by level and subject of academic education, by field of professional or technical employment or primary competence, by place of birth and present citizenship, by source of language or area knowledge, by military or reserve status, by number and kind of additional language or area knowledges—in fact, by any one or combination of factors covered by the questionnaires. Such statistical information can be used as a factual basis for such programs as the following: coordination of interdepartmental plans for utilization of scarce skills in case of emergency, training or scholarship programs in terms of both kind and volume, preparation of informational and instructional material, development of tests of proficiency, and so on. This statistical function can be served with various degrees of efficiency by means of continuous, periodic, or sporadic (one-shot) surveys. The analyses that are designed from a Register should in large part determine the method of survey. Certainly for planning long range objectives sporadic surveys are of doubtful utility.

Another potential function of a Register is to serve as the basis for biographical or other directories. Such directories may be strictly alphabetical by name of individual. They may also include cross-reference lists by whatever types of specialization are considered desirable, or by location of present residence. Directories serve many purposes, depending upon their content and structure and their degree of published availability. In general they can serve to facilitate wider utilization of persons possessing scarce skills, but they have the disadvantage of being partially obsolete even while in press. Furthermore, publication of information concerning individuals might require their prior consent.

Some Problems

In the development and maintenance of a Register of Area and Language Specialists, unusual problems would be encountered. Some differ in degree and some in kind from those encountered in other Registers.

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One problem involves the obtaining of names and addresses of individuals to whom questionnaires would be sent. There is virtually no problem concerning full-fledged "area specialists" or "area and language specialists" who are engaged in this field occupationally or who publish books or articles in the field. If a Register is intended, however, to cover individuals who possess only language or linguistic ability, or who incidentally possess first-hand knowledge of foreign areas or localities, the search becomes both more complex and more expensive. To discover, for example, the names and addresses of the housewives, lawyers, etc., who learned a rare and strategically important language, or who lived in a specific city while they were children residing abroad with their parents (missionary, commercial, military, or foreign service), would require contacts with many different organizations, and perhaps even a nation-wide publicity campaign.

Another problem, common to all Registers, is maintaining current addresses and data concerning registrants. Effective techniques are available for this purpose.

A different problem requiring different techniques is achieving a high response rate when registration is voluntary.

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